



## MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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# Nature Focused Outdoor Classroom coming to High Park

## **\$269,900 Weston Family Parks Challenge grant to support High Park Nature Centre's outdoor classroom**

**Toronto** - The Weston Family Parks Challenge has committed \$269,900 over three years to support the High Park Nature Centre's *Outdoor Urban Restoration Space (OURSpace)*. The project will bring together innovative partners to create a nature-focused outdoor classroom. Through hands-on education opportunities, the High Park Nature Centre and the community will restore an under-utilized area of the park back to the original oak savannah ecosystem. Public, private and non-profit partners will enable the long-term sustainability of the project, facilitating a larger vision of a leading urban nature hub in the historic Forest School building in High Park.

High Park's black oak savannah is a designated Environmentally Significant Area (ESA). These beautifully open, grassy areas have an amazing diversity of species and include many rare plant species. OURSpace is unique area that will combine restoration and education. By creating a 'bridge' between High Park's recreation areas and restoration areas, OURSpace will provide a critical learning zone where participants from around Toronto can plant native species and help care for this amazing ecosystem.

This grant will enable the High Park Nature Centre to engage the community in planting 15,000 native savannah grasses and wildflowers while highlighting the significance of the black oak savannah. In addition, the grant will fund a shaded seated area for teaching, demonstration gardens and interpretive learning stations with bat boxes, bird boxes, snake hibernacula and bird feeders to support local species diversity.

Great parks are essential to Toronto's health and vitality. They strengthen the community and provide environmental, economic and social benefits. With a commitment of \$5 million over three years, [The W. Garfield Weston Foundation](#) launched the Weston Family Parks Challenge to ensure the long-term sustainability of Toronto's parks. Building on the success of the first year, the Ontario Trillium Foundation joined in 2014 with an additional commitment of \$1.125 million towards the initiative. Toronto Park People brings expertise and is administering the program. The Weston Family Parks Challenge supports projects that enhance the natural elements in parks, engage a broad range of partners and the local community, offer new solutions to manage and maintain parks, and have the potential to be replicated in other jurisdictions.

"So often we focus our lives on the inside of buildings and on technology. The outdoor classroom of OURSpace will allow the community to learn, and participate in, the lost art and science of creating a unique natural habitat" said Lisa Clarkson, president of the High Park Nature Centre's Board of Directors.

"This generous funding from the Weston Family Parks Challenge will allow us to highlight the amazing species diversity that we have in High Park in a way that both educates and instills a personal investment from our extended community." said Natalie Harder, Executive Director of The High Park Nature Centre. "We believe that

having a site that allows people to get their hands dirty, explore and learn about Environmentally Sensitive Areas in a hands-on way will serve as a model and inspiration for others.”

Planting will begin in the spring 2015 with a savannah celebration event slated for the fall of 2015.

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**For media information or visuals, please call:**

Natalie Harder, 416 392 1748, [natalie@highpark.org](mailto:natalie@highpark.org)

About the **High Park Nature Centre**: Founded in 1999 by High Park Initiatives, the High Park Nature Centre promotes awareness and respect for nature by providing school programs, curriculum enrichment, educational camps, nature clubs, and community outreach programs. Our outdoor education and park stewardship programs currently serve more than 9,000 children, youth, families, adults and educators each year.  
[www.highparknaturecentre.com](http://www.highparknaturecentre.com)